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EAST TIMOR: THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-DETERMINATION

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I was twelve years old when the Indonesian military invaded my country. I fled to the mountains with my family and for three years, hid in the jungle. We had little food, no medicine, and no weapons to defend ourselves with but we were not alone. Thousands of East Timorese families had fled into the mountains like us to escape the terror of the invasion; others fled to Australia or Portugal as refugees.

During those years in the mountains, people were dying all around me. Many were killed by the Indonesian military; others died more slowly through starvation or disease. It is hard for me to describe those years, but I can still see the Skyhawks and Bronco AV10 aircraft that the Indonesians used in their attempts to eliminate us. As you probably know, those aircraft are manufactured in the United States.

When I was fifteen years old I went to the front line as a guerrilla fighter. At that time, the Indonesians controlled all the food producing areas and people were starving in the mountains. We were fighting to protect and feed them - as well as for our right to self determination. I fought the Indonesians for eight months then I trained as a nurse because I wanted to help the sick and injured.

In September 1978, the Indonesian army's Battalion 410 arrested me and my family in Remxio village south of Dili . Again I watched my people die. I watched them die every day. Many of the people I knew were interrogated, tortured - and then they disappeared. After our arrest, we were forced to learn the Indonesian language and sing the Indonesian national anthem. The first words we learned to pronounce were *salamat pagi bapak* and *selamat siang*. (Good morning and good afternoon.) For two months I studied this new language and then, to survive, I worked for a police commander as a *tenaga bantuan operasi* which is like a carrier or a very lowly servant.

On December 1978 I returned to Dili with my parents. Somehow we and the other families who survived the terror in the mountains had to reconstruct our lives again. My father and I worked as laborers to take care of our extended family. In January 1979 I was at last able to continue my education at Externasto de St. Jose, a Portuguese school run by Father Leao da Costa . At the time, this was the only Portuguese school still operating in Dili, but it too was closed by the Indonesian army after the massacre of November 12 1991.

I finished school in 1988 and became a teacher of religion at this school. This was my cover for my work in the resistance. I sent food and medicine to the fighters still in the mountains and kept them informed about what was happening in Dili and the other towns and villages occupied by the Indonesian army. I also monitored what was happening abroad.

One of my main tasks however was to develop the civilian resistance by uniting all the independent groups resisting the Indonesian occupation. I began this work in 1986 with a small cell of seven people. Our code was 007! The umbrella organization at the time was known as the Revolutionary Council of National Resistance (CRRN). In 1989, CRRN was transformed into CNRM - the National Council of Maubere Resistance. In effect, CNRM is a non-partisan clandestine coalition of all East Timorese nationalist groups including student organizations, our army Falantil plus the two major political parties Fretilin and UDT

In 1990 I was elected Secretary of the Executive Committee of the CNRM . My work as Executive Secretary included meeting with resistance leaders in the jungle and coordinating all clandestine activities in the towns and villages.

At this time, the leader of the resistance was Xanana Gusmao, a hero to a whole generation of young East Timorese both inside East Timor and in the diaspora. He was captured by the Indonesian military on November 20, 1992 and is still on trial in Dili.

In 1991, after Xanana Gusmao had made an offer to participate in UN sponsored talks without pre-conditions about the future of East Timor, we invited an Australian lawyer and journalist , Robert Domm, to secretly interview him for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. It was a very dangerous mission but we in East Timor were prepared to take the risk because it was so important that the rest of the world hear about our continuing struggle for self-determination. I organized the visit, escorted Domm through the mountains to Xanana's campsite, and acted as his translator. After Robert Domm had finished his interview, I talked all night with Xanana then escorted the Australian back to safety.

Three weeks later, Xanana's camp was surrounded by Indonesian troops. Xanana escaped but the Indonesians took everything he had left there, including a photograph of me and a copy of the taped interview with Robert Domm.

The Indonesians caught and arrested me on the morning of January 25, 1991, my birthday. I told them I would never forget the birthday present they gave me - for, after the police had finished with me at the station, I had blood coming out of my nose, my ears, my eyes and my mouth. My body was swollen all over.

The beating continued from 9 o'clock on the morning I was arrested until 10 o'clock at night. They stripped me, and after every question they kicked and punched me all over and jabbed me with their outstretched hands in the abdomen to purposely cause damage to my internal organs. The beat me even while I was bleeding. They repeatedly threatened to kill me, to throw me into the sea. They called it *mandi laut*. They threatened my family too. They said that if I didn't tell them what I was doing and where Xanana was, they would harm my parents and my wife. They told me I would be responsible for whatever happened to them.

After the beating at the police station, I was transferred to Senopato II prison where I was interrogated by Captain Edy Suprianto and Lieutenant Colonel Gatot, the head of intelligence in East Timor. That interrogation continued for four days non stop. The Indonesians worked in shifts and rested - but they forced me to stay awake the whole time. When they finished with me, they threw me in a cell alone. There was no mattress, no blankets, so I slept on the bare cement. It was very cold.

There were thirteen other East Timorese political prisoners in that prison while I was there. These people had been detained three months earlier and had all been tortured: with electric shocks, cigarette burns to the skin and knife cuts. One, Abilio Sarmento, had a broken jaw and another political prisoner, David Talofo, was suffering severe mental trauma when I saw him.

One week after my capture, I was released on condition that I present myself to Captain Edy and Colonel Gatot three times a week. Even then, my movements were monitored by Indonesian intelligence. Sometimes they came to my house and continued to interrogate me about the underground organization and about Xanana Gusmao. And each time I presented myself to the police station, the Indonesians threatened me and tried to force me into betraying Xanana and the resistance. People have to deal with this kind of intimidation every day in East Timor.

Each time I was interrogated, I told the officers that I could not give them any information because I didn't have any – I was no longer a leader. Anyway, I said, my people wouldn't tell me anything because they knew I had been arrested by the Indonesians.

Although I didn't know it at the time, Indonesian intelligence had lied to the international media after my capture and boasted that I was a double agent. This was another of their clumsy attempts to undermine the resistance in East Timor.

My capture in 1991 came at a time when the resistance was preparing for the proposed visit to East Timor of a Portuguese parliamentary delegation. Xanana Gusmao had given me instructions but I had been arrested before I could communicate these to all the other resistance leaders. It was urgent therefore that I continue my clandestine activities as soon as I got out of prison - even though I was officially under house arrest and being threatened continually by the Indonesian authorities.

We East Timorese had great expectations for the proposed visit by the Portuguese parliamentary delegation. We saw it as an opportunity to show the world what was happening in our country – for we knew there would be foreign journalists accompanying the delegation.

Meanwhile, the Indonesians were doing everything they could to intimidate the population into submission. On 29 October, the Indonesian army ambushed Motael church in Dili and killed Sebastiao Gomes, a 22 year old student who had sought sanctuary there. Soldiers surrounded the church, broke into it and shot Sebastiao in the stomach. He bled to death on the steps of the church.

I was to be next. The military knew of my role in the resistance because they had forced some of the detainees to admit, under torture, that I was still their leader. On November 1,

Martino Alau, an Indonesian intelligence policeman, held a meeting at his house to plan my re-capture and possible execution. I was informed of this at three o'clock that afternoon on my way home to my family. Instead of going home, I immediately went into hiding. I could not even say goodbye to my wife nor my parents and I have not seen them since that day. To contact them would have been to risk their lives as well as my own. I heard later that the army had surrounded my house and interrogated my wife and parents, then waited for me to return. At the time, my wife was five months pregnant with our first child. He was born after I left Dili and is now one year old.

To our great disappointment, the Portuguese Parliamentary delegation never arrived. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture, Mr Pieter Kooijmans (who is now the Foreign Minister of Holland) was did visit Dili however; we desperately wanted to show him what we were suffering. On November 10, I met secretly with students and other members of the resistance and together we decided to organize a demonstration in his honor.

'We have to do something because Mr. Pieter Kooijmans is now here,' the young people told me that night.
'Don't you think that Indonesia will kill you?' I asked them.
'Never!' they said.

We held the demonstration on November 12 1991, a week after Sebastiao's funeral. It is our custom to remember our dead seven days after the funeral by placing flowers on the grave. In Tetun we call it *ai funan midar* which means 'sweet flowers'. The mourners not only brought flowers but banners too which they hid underneath their jackets then unfurled as they marched to the cemetery. Many believed the presence of foreign journalists would protect them from the direct vengeance of the Indonesian military.

Our plan was to demonstrate peacefully. None of the marchers did anything to provoke the Indonesian troops. But, as they passed one of the government buildings, the police *agents provocateurs* began throwing rocks, breaking windows and beating the demonstrators with sticks. When they arrived at the cemetery, it seemed like the Indonesian military had prepared an ambush. One, two, maybe five minutes after the marchers had entered the cemetery gates, the military opened fire. I was hiding in a house 500 meters away and could not see what was happening. But I heard the gun shots and screaming. I also saw the Indonesians throw the dead and wounded onto trucks for the drive to the military hospital. There were seven trucks.

Two American journalists, Amy Goodman and Alan Nairn, were in Dili at the time of the massacre. When they saw the Indonesians raise their M16s, they stood between the soldiers and the demonstrators in an attempt to prevent any bloodshed. But the soldiers just kept marching into the crowd firing their guns. After the killing, the soldiers arrested many of the demonstrators including some they had injured. Many of these young people have not been heard of since.

At noon – about two hours after the shooting – I told one of the mothers who was looking for her son, to go to the hospital to see if he was amongst the wounded. When she arrived, one of the Indonesian soldiers said to her 'please go to Tasi Tolu and see your son. The grave is still open for you.' She was not allowed inside the hospital.

Between December and February I collected the names of people who had been killed at the cemetery or had died from injuries received that day. Our official death toll was 271. Many more are still unaccounted for. If you have seen the television coverage from that massacre, you will know that the demonstrators were mostly young people, East Timor's future. Their murder is further evidence of the genocide the Indonesian military is committing against our people.

After the Santa Cruz massacre, my photograph was circulated throughout East Timor and Indonesia on state run television and in the press. I was a hunted man. I remained in my country for a further seven months, sleeping in different houses every night or in the jungle. Any one of the people who gave me shelter could have betrayed me, but no-one did. This is proof, I believe, of the effectiveness of the resistance in East Timor.

I eventually escaped by car to Kupang in West Timor, and from there travelled to Jakarta where I remained in hiding for a further five months. I arrived in Lisbon in early November 1992 to continue my work for the East Timorese resistance in exile. I am now CNRM's representative in Portugal.

Not long after I arrived in Lisbon, Xanana Gusmao was captured in Dili. (November 20, 1992.) At that moment many people thought his capture marked the end of the resistance in East Timor. But I would like to tell you that the struggle does not depend on just one person: it depends on the determination of the East Timorese people. Xanana's successor Mau Huno has now also been arrested - but again he is just one man.

We East Timorese know that we can never win a military victory against the might of Indonesia; we are but half a million people against 180 million Indonesians. Our victory must be a political one based on international law and justice. Many of the decisions that will affect our future will be made in Washington and New York. That is why I am touring North America with this delegation of young East Timorese – to tell the North American people about what is happening in our country and urge you all to put pressure on your representatives in government to resolve the conflict in East Timor. To stop sending military hardware to Indonesia and to halt all economic aid to Indonesia until that country recognizes the basic human rights of the East Timorese people, including our right to self-determination. For there can be no peace in East Timor our right to self-determination is recognized and acted upon.

At the Human Rights Commission in Geneva earlier this year, I witnessed a significant shift in US foreign policy towards East Timor that gave me hope. On March 11, the United States and Canada plus 22 other governments from the European Community, the Nordic states, with Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique and Costa Rica co-sponsored a resolution condemning the Indonesian government for its human rights violations in East Timor. The resolution was carried 22 votes in favour and 12 against, with 15 abstentions. This was the first time a resolution had been successful on East Timor at this important UN forum. For us East Timorese, it is a sign that at last the outside world is awakening to its responsibility.

One resolution in far off Geneva does not in itself stop the intimidation and human rights abuses in Dili and other parts of East Timor, nor does it facilitate a UN sponsored act of self-determination. Especially when there are an estimated 40,000 Indonesian troops still stationed on East Timorese soil as part of *Operasi Tuntas* (or Operation Once And For

All). But the Geneva resolution is a sign of change and something for the international community to build upon.

There is another opportunity this month for the international community to act to resolve the conflict in East Timor. On April 21 the UN Secretary General is hosting talks between Portugal and Indonesia in Rome. So far, the East Timorese have not been invited to participate - although the UN secretary General's Special Envoy Mr Amos Waco, is in Dili as I speak. But since East Timor is *our* country, we believe we should be represented at all negotiations about our future. We are ready to participate in round table talks without pre-conditions at any time.

Like all East Timorese, I've suffered many difficulties since Indonesia invaded my country in 1975. I don't want my son whom I have never seen, to have to go through what my generation and my parents' generation have been through. Unless the international community acts decisively to facilitate an internationally supervised act of self-determination in East Timor, I'm afraid the pattern of the past seventeen years will be repeated over and over again: resistance to Indonesian occupation, intimidation by the Indonesian military, atrocities against the Timorese people. More resistance, more intimidation, more atrocities. I don't want my child to have to go through that, nor anyone else's child. And I want to be able to see my wife and my son some day.

Constancio Pinto is one of five East Timorese who visited North America in April 1993 to talk about the future of their occupied country. Their speaking tour was initiated by the East Timorese community in Melbourne, Australia, with the support of the East Timor Talks Campaign. It was hosted and coordinated in North America by the East Timor Action Network USA and East Timor Alert Network Canada.

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